Multiculturalism and Music in Britain: Ethnography, Empiricism and Everyday Lives

Friday 16th March 2012

St David’s Room, Department of Music, King’s College London
Strand Campus, King’s Building, Level 2:
http://www.kcl.ac.uk/campuslife/campuses/download/KBLlevel2forweb.pdf

09:00 Registration

09:15 Welcome / Opening Remarks
Carolyn Landau, King’s College London & Thomas Hodgson, University of Oxford

09:30 – 11:30 Panel 1: Multicultural Publics and Policies
Chair & Respondent: Thomas Hodgson, University of Oxford

David Clarke, University of Newcastle upon Tyne: “Connecting cultures? South Asian musics and an emerging multiculturalism in North East England”


Patrick Allen, Ifield Community College: “Teaching Chagossian Teenagers in Crawley”

11:30 – 12:00 Coffee

12:00 – 13:30 Panel 2: ‘Britishness’
Chair & Respondent: Miriam Gazzah, University of Amsterdam

Carl Morris, Study of Islam in the UK, Cardiff University: “Sounds Islamic: British Muslims, Music and Multiculturalism”

Jonathan Paylor, Institute for Volunteering Research: “Bass Nation: An Ethnographic Study into London’s Multiculture and Dubstep and Grime scene(s)”

13:30 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 16:30 Panel 3: Place, Belonging & (Trans)Nationalism
Chair & Respondent: Razia Sultanova, University of Cambridge

Emma Brinkhurst, Goldsmiths College, University of London: “Creative Connections: The Somali Bard in London”

Gurdeep Khabra, University of Liverpool: “Music and the Heritage of the British Asian Diaspora: Narrations of Cultural Memory and Cultural Identity”

Sean Campbell, Anglia Ruskin, Cambridge: “The Importance of Being (London) Irish: Transnationalism, Place and The Pogues”

16:30 – 17:00 Tea

17:00 – 18:30 Panel 4: Performance Practices
Chair & Respondent: Caroline Bithell, University of Manchester

Tenley Martin, University of Leeds: “Flamenca Britannica: the UK Interpretation of a Spanish Tradition”

Sue Miller, University of Leeds: “Perceptions of Authenticity in the Performance of Cuban Popular Music in the UK: reflections on the promotion and reception of UK-based Charanga del Norte's music since 1998”

18:30 – 19:30 Performance presentations
Katy Carr: “Music links generations and cultures”
Nigel Hoyle: “Nowhere in the middle of everywhere”

19:30 – 19:45 Concluding Remarks
Carolyn Landau, King’s College London & Thomas Hodgson, University of Oxford

20:00 Dinner in local Restaurant
Abstracts

Connecting cultures? South Asian musics and an emerging multiculturalism in North East England
David Clarke, University of Newcastle upon Tyne

If one sees music not as the expression of a racial ‘essence’ but as something culturally and historically constituted – and hence mutable and porous – then it perhaps holds the possibility for a different way for people to relate across cultural boundaries (as much as it enables them to find a sense of identity and solidarity inside them). In this sense, music may offer a distinctive way of navigating debates on multiculturalism.

Indian classical music offers its own take on this situation. In the UK (as in South Asia) it is practiced at professional and amateur levels, by people of different religious persuasions (or none) living in different regions. Moreover, in its recent history Indian music has also been learnt by white UK residents. Hence it holds the possibility of a variety of cultural encounters and of connecting diverse communities of practice (as well as related ones).

More specifically, I want in this presentation to consider Indian music activities in Newcastle upon Tyne. The city is home to various South Asian communities, and in recent years links have grown between certain of them and members of Newcastle University (myself included) through the learning of North Indian classical music, and through various events around it and other South Asian musics – fostered also by regional arts development organisations. The situation is now perhaps at a crossroads (which may be true for other regions and other communities): many of the ingredients are in place for developing these connections into a rich, constructive multiculturalism around music. Yet what is inhibiting progress to this more mature phase?

What models of community, cultural plurality and cross-cultural engagement are needed to nurture these emerging shoots?

In an approach that is partly empirical and partly ethnographic, I will explore these issues making reference to my own engagement with individuals from Hindu communities in the city, and my participation in events as a local practitioner of Hindustani classical music. My inquiry will consider (i) multiculturalism as an inner, personal process, (ii) the role of educational institutions (such as my own University) and arts development organisations in the fostering of a civic multiculturalism, and (iii) the dynamics of communities across a bigger multicultural field.

Democracy Now, or, Beyond Access and Diversity: the social value of the contemporary Proms
Jonathan Gross, London Consortium

The BBC Proms has been accused and defended in the name of the ‘democratization’ of classical music from its creation in 1895 to the present day. Employing my fieldwork with Proms audiences to interrogate these claims and counterclaims, I show there are important tensions within the somehow-democratic discourses and practices of ‘newness’ found at the Proms: the cultivation of new music and new audiences. Examining the mutual mediation of this publically contested institution and the listeners who help constitute it, I use my ethnographic material to assess the democratic credentials of the contemporary Proms by considering the different ways in which my interviewees experience, understand and attribute value to the Proms as a social site: as an institution through which they are - in some sense - involved with other people. This means both specifying the socio-political qualities attributed to the concerts by current audiences, (whether in the name of democracy or not), and considering the extent to which these same qualities are discernible within the attitudes and practices of a range of listeners. I argue that if the Proms was conceived by Newman and Wood as a democratizing force in British classical music, this can no longer be the way in which the social value of these concerts is understood. Instead, we need to think hard about what it means for the Proms to be a public institution. The Proms has multiple publics, coming in and out of being, and sometimes coming into conflict with each other. It is in these multiple and contested shared experiences – beyond the ‘accessibility’ of the Proms - that we find the implications of this concert series for shared life in twenty-first century Britain.

Sounds Islamic: British Muslims, Music and Multiculturalism
Carl Morris, Cardiff University

Over the last decade Muslims within Britain have faced intense scrutiny and are often placed at the heart of debates concerning multiculturalism and ‘community cohesion’. This dialectic has been fuelled in part by a discourse concerned with the cultural and social dissonance of Muslim identity within a wider British communality – some sections of society question the very loyalty and belonging of British Muslims to a national ethos. These debates are further complicated by a continual blurring of the boundaries that supposedly demarcate communities – whether local, national or global – when in actual fact British Muslims ‘belong’ to many different communities, often possessing a mix of national, diasporic, class, religious, cultural and/or local affiliations.

Within the context of these debates, music and other forms of cultural production have largely been overlooked. Drawing on intensive and original fieldwork, this paper will explore the relatively recent emergence of Muslim musicians within a British Muslim public sphere, and the corresponding development of self-consciously Islamic sound aesthetics – ranging from “Muslim hip hop” through to nasheed and na’at. Through an examination of the accounts given by these musicians – particularly concerning their approach to lyrical content, performance and the use of instrumentation – it is possible to examine the process of continual negotiation that many of these musicians need to pursue when operating amongst complex and cross-cutting communities. It will become evident throughout this paper that the practice of music can be indicative of the dynamics within a heterogeneous British Muslim demographic, especially with regard to issues around religious authority, gender, ethnicity, sectarianism and engagement with a wider, hegemonic culture.

Bass Nation: An Ethnographic Study into London’s Multiculture and Dubstep and Grime scene(s)
Jonathan Paylor, Institute for Volunteering Research

This paper is based on an ethnographic study which explored London’s grime and dubstep music scene(s) and how cultural difference is experienced and negotiated in everyday situations. The paper argues that through their syncretic nature, dubstep and grime challenge essentialist constructions of Britishness and provide contexts where an intercultural dialogue emerges and hybrid identities that break down the black/white racial binary are constituted. It is argued, however, that the cross-cultural connections and identifications made are temporary and fragile, as they are dependent on the context and in dispute with essentialist
discourses. This results in a shifting and sometimes contradictory nature of identity: in some contexts, cultures cross over and the boundaries between ethnic groups are permeable; in other contexts, the boundaries are reinstated as people identify strongly with an ethnic and cultural group. The paper therefore challenges essentialist perspectives that imply that identity and culture is pure, fixed and homogenous. At the same time, however, it reminds us not to overstate the agency of cultural identities, as they are not optional and free floating, but shaped and constrained by discourses and structures of racism.

**Creative Connections: The Somali Bard in London**

**Emma Brinkhurst, Goldsmiths College, University of London**

Once regarded as a “nation of bards” (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964: 3), Somalia’s civil war and subsequent state collapse led Said S. Samatar to assert that “the Kalashnikov has taken over from the pastoral bard as the ruling king of the roost” (2010: 218). In the diaspora, however, Somali poets and musicians continue to serve as mediators and figureheads. In this paper I will argue that the bard-like figure remains central to social life in the Somali diaspora, making geographical, temporal and cross-cultural connections through poetry and music. Testimony to this are the creative practices of two Somali artists living in London: Xudeydi, formerly known in Somalia as the “King of the Oud”, and Abdullahi Boottan Hassan, a poet who strives to bring about cultural integration through Somali arts workshops in Camden schools. I will discuss the active nature of their oral texts, which serve as meeting points for past and present and London and Somalia, thus contributing to the negotiation of place, individual and collective identity, and belonging amongst Somalis in London. Given the dominant narratives of piracy, terrorism and famine associated with Somalia by the UK’s media I will highlight the attempts of Abdullahi Boottan Hassan to encourage cross-cultural understanding by adapting Somali pastoral poetry for a contemporary, multicultural audience.

**References**


**Music and the Heritage of the British Asian Diaspora: Narrations of Cultural Memory and Cultural Identity**

**Gurdeep Khabra, University of Liverpool**

As part of the POPID (Popular Music Heritage, Cultural Memory, and Cultural Identity) project, this paper explores the relationship between popular music and cultural identity through a focus on the music of the British Asian diaspora in England. Music has become a key constituent of modern-day notions of heritage, with organisations such as English Heritage erecting blue plaques to honour musicians who are considered to be ‘national treasures’. At the same time, ‘alternative heritage’ organisations such as the Anglo-Sikh Heritage Trail work to commemorate a decidedly different heritage that it is felt is ignored or poorly told through the dominant narrative. Do these ‘alternative’ heritages represent different understandings of ‘Britishness’? Through a focus on music, this paper explores the way in which different heritages – on the one-hand a dominant, national heritage story, and on the other a local, diasporic heritage story - are narrated, in relation to questions raised by Stuart Hall in his 1999 paper “Whose Heritage?”

Furthermore, there is a focus on unpacking the way in which diaspora music is represented by national heritage organisations. In this way discrepancies between ‘local’ and ‘national’ representations of heritage are revealed – the way in which, for example, an artist can be locally championed, heralded as a hugely influential resident figure, and yet be widely unheard of nationally. Similarly, an artist could be well known to a particular town’s diaspora group, but unheard of to the wider, national diaspora. This analysis is supplemented by research into Asian record shops, which during the early 80s have often claimed to have sold thousands of records per week, but due to regulations were unable to be acknowledged as part of the UK’s official music chart listings. This history, of a community supporting artists that they feel represents them, and the lack of acknowledgement from ‘official’ sources such as the music charts, provides an interesting case study for the exploration of the day-to-day experiences of music makers and listeners within the diaspora.

**The Importance of Being (London) Irish: Transnationalism, Place and The Pogues**

**Sean Campbell, Anglia Ruskin, Cambridge**

This paper explores the work of The Pogues as a transnational (London-Irish) intervention in British popular music culture. Drawing on original interviews with the band members, including Shane MacGowan, Cait O’Riordan and Philip Chevron (as well as extensive archival research of print and audio-visual media), it explores the band’s oeuvre as an invocation of Irish migrant life in the English metropolis. Seeing The Pogues' work as a negotiation of ‘dwelling-in-displacement’, the paper locates the band on the threshold of an Irish-English interface, a hybrid or ‘in-between’ space that served as a creative wellsprings and a burden. Specific songs are seen to evince a remedial function, affording both listener and speaker with a means by which to reconcile to the ‘here and now’ of host-culture life whilst evoking affinities with the absent ‘homeland’. The paper also reflects on The Pogues’ reception in mid-1980s Ireland, where the band became the focus of caustic attacks from both musicians and journalists, many of whom saw The Pogues as suspect English interlopers making unwelcome incursions into Irish culture. The paper argues that the band's imaginary evinced an expressly transnational impulse, issuing an implied critique to both English and Irish nationalisms.

**Flamencab Britanica: the UK Interpretation of a Spanish Tradition**

**Tenley Martin, University of Leeds**

Around the UK there exist small pockets of flamenca aficionados consisting primarily of relocated Spanish performers and British enthusiasts. These groups represent a faction devoted to the practice and preservation of a passionate and emotionally intense art persisting independent of its Andalucian homeland. A love of foreign cultures is, by no means, a new concept in the UK. Salsa has been a craze for several decades, with dance classes, live bands, and club nights plentiful in most cities. Unlike Salsa, Flamenco rhythms are irregular with unpredictable tempos and vocals that are often less accessible to non-Spanish ears. Additionally, a large
part of Flamenco’s meaning emanates from a history of collective suffering amongst the Gitanos and Andalusians who practice it. With this factor in mind, it is difficult to comprehend how such a musical tradition could be recreated outside of the intimate taverns and village squares of Southern Spain.

This paper explores the localization of Andalusian flamenco in the context of the UK. It addresses not only flamenco’s adaptation to fit within British cultural sensibilities but also how the music itself aids non-Spanish participants to connect with what they claim as the original Andalusian meaning behind the artform. My research is supported by an ethnographic assessment of several UK flamenco groups, scrutinising primarily group dynamics, characteristics and performance practices. Ultimately, this paper provides insight into how the UK’s interpretation of flamenco reflects on how the country absorbs and re-transmits music practices and, therefore, makes claims to multiculturalism.

Perceptions of Authenticity in the Performance of Cuban Popular Music in the UK: reflections on the promotion and reception of UK-based Charanga del Norte's music since 1998

Sue Miller, University of Leeds

This paper challenges the essentialism inherent in much promotion of Latin music and illustrates how issues of gender and race have affected perceptions of authenticity in this case study of Charanga del Norte, a UK-grown Cuban music dance band. This group was set up in 1998 using the traditional Cuban charanga orquesta line-up of flute, violins, piano, bass, timbales, güiro, congas and vocals. Over these twelve years the band has featured musicians from a variety of ethnic backgrounds such as British (including British Caribbean and Asian), Cuban, South American (Colombian, Venezuelan and Chilean) and African (Senegalese and Gambian) whilst outside promotion of the orquesta has tended towards exoticization, using essentialized images of 'Latin' music. The Buena Vista Social Club1 phenomenon emerged at the same time as Charanga del Norte but strangely, even though the band played the same 1950s styles of music (mambo, son, danzón, and chachachá) it was promoted either as a northern UK-based salsa band or as a 'roots' band where African origins were emphasised by promoters. The term 'world music' has been problematic when applied to Latin music forms, as Deborah Hernandez has documented in her article Dancing With The Enemy.2 Many musicians in Charanga del Norte have been British Asian or Caribbean (often third or fourth generation) and this has sometimes led to uncomfortable performances at refugee events, Cuba Solidarity performances and world music festivals, where musicians’ ethnicities have tended to be the focus of attention rather than the music itself. Based on my experiences performing Cuban music in the UK I argue the case for a more nuanced definition of what it means to be multicultural on the UK's Latin and World Music stage today.

Keywords: authenticity, cultural identity, gender, race, transnational popular music and transcultural processes, multiculturalism

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1 Buena Vista Social Club was a group formed by Juan de Marcos González and Ry Cooder after an initial recording project and film of the same name in the late 1990s.